

FIRST AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE.

A Prototype of the Modern Vehicle Made Here in 1860 and Still in Use.

Since motor vehicles became the thing there has been much discussion concerning when the first one was made and many old prints have been dragged out to prove that a steam wagon is not a new thing, except in point of development and practicability. It will cause surprise to many modern chauffeurs to learn that what was almost unquestionably the first practical automobile was made in this country forty-five years ago and that its duplicate, built five years later, is still in use as a pleasure vehicle. This rare old relic has been unearthed by an automobile maker and has been on exhibition at the show in Madison Square Garden. It is the property of Frank P. Dodge of Locust Valley, L. I., and was built by his father, Richard Dodge, who was well known in the mechanical field as the inventor of the hydraulic pump. This classic auto is practically a locomotive built for the road. It has a long low carriage of standing 200 pounds, pressed that set low between four solid wheels. The cedar wood fitted with steel rods. There are steam chests and cylinders and pistons and driving rods all set on the inside of the wheels after the English fashion instead of on the outside as is common to American locomotives.

There is a short smokestack at the front of the boiler, but there is no chimney or stack at the rear.

The similarity to a true railway locomotive ends, for there is no cowcatcher, nor headlight, no bell, no tender. Over the driving rods on each side is a long upholstered seat, capable of containing six persons.

Underneath these sit for their full length are flattened compartments which hold the engine, carrying water.

At the rear of the machine are two seats one on each side of a central entrance way that is reached by a stone step entrance.

On either side of the entrance are two seats, one for the driver and steward, and they are set low so that the furnaces door can hardly reach them. There is a depression between the seats which is about the size of a man's head.

The steering is done from the rear seat on the right hand side by means of a wheel at the end of a long wooden lever which is provided with a worm that works in a socket on one side of the axis so that the wheel on that side can be turned without turning the one in the other direction. It is very difficult to steer and the inventor and his son are the only ones who can do it.

He has sold his car to a successful New Englander who is fond of it as if it were an animal.

It goes out on two or three times a month and covers a distance of over five hundred miles and develops eight horse power.

It attains a speed of forty miles an hour for short distances and is frequently run at a speed of twenty miles an hour for more than thirty miles an hour. Its best record made on a water within recent years is a mile in a minute and 32 seconds. This record was broken by a man in a boat who went to the river for pleasure and has travelled thousands of miles, its longest trip being from New York to Bridgeport and back. In a single day it was driven from New York to the Hudson River under its own steam and brought to New York by its own power from Locust Valley where its owner has a house especially constructed for it.

The story of how this forefather of automobiles came to be built was told to a reporter by Mr. Dodge by his personal physician, Dr. Dugdale, who, unlike most people, is not interested in the automobile industry, but has marine engineers.

In 1855 this man, all novices in the realm of mechanics and engineering, were discussing something in a vinegar vat was the possibility of building a practical self-moving vehicle.

He was the son of Richard Dodge, a Scotchman by birth, William Foster a well-known builder of steam engines, and Sir Hudson of the Royal Engineers.

He was a regular schoolboy but under the terms of which each of the three was attempting to make an automobile and the one who did not succeed would be beaten.

This machine was made at the Greenway near Bromley. It was run over the roads about New York under a general permit for a great number of years and was used as a pleasure vehicle for a year when it was taken to London and exhibited at the Crystal Palace and it was destroyed, so far as the inventor could find out, in a fire.

Mr. Dodge, however, did not give up his fancy, but in 1860 he built a perfect duplicate of the automobile at his shop at 24 Columbia Street, this time the machine was made of iron and wood and was shown to the public at the Crystal Palace.

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